

Time Machine (1896): A ride in a horseless carriage

By San Francisco Call, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.20.16

Word Count **636**



Henry Ford sits in his first automobile, the Ford Quadricycle, in 1896. Also called a horseless carriage, it sold for \$200.

Photo: Newsweek, via Wikipedia

This article was originally published in the May 31, 1896, edition of the San Francisco Call. Horseless carriage is a term for early automobiles. At the time, carriages were pulled by animals, typically horses, but the new automobiles were not.

Horseless carriages are coming. Soon, they may even be more popular than horses.

Many horse owners say they will never buy a horseless carriage. They say it is no fun to use the machine. They warn that it is dangerous.

They will be proved wrong, though. Every new thing is doubted at first. The steam car once scared people. Now trains and boats run on steam. People did not think Edison's light bulb would work. Now it lights up the night. People were unsure about the telephone. Now everybody uses it. It will be the same with the horseless carriage.

Better roads are being built in the West. This will make using the horseless carriage easier. The cost of the carriage will go down. Soon we shall be able to buy one for the price of a horse.

Lots Of Questions

People ask, "But how does it feel to ride in one? Does the thing shake you up? Is it too noisy? Is it hard to steer?"

I can now answer these questions. Yesterday, I made a special trip in a horseless carriage. I went with J.M. Ough of the California Gas Engine Company. Ough is planning to build horseless carriages.

I was very impressed. To start the carriage, a button under the seat is pressed. An electric spark lights the gasoline. The engine sounds like a soft train engine. There is a buzzing sound of electricity. The brake is then unlocked. Away drives the carriage. When it is moving, the noise is much less. It rides smoothly and turns corners well.

Horses Are Startled

Just ahead of us is a country woman driving a horse. The woman is curious. She pays more attention to the horseless carriage than to her horse. She pulls her horse toward us. The horseless carriage easily avoids a crash, though. If needed, the brake could have stopped us.

Horses fear the horseless carriage. They move back quickly as it passes. One horse we passed was tied up beside the road. It jumped and broke his rope. It wildly ran off. Perhaps it can guess that horses will soon be replaced.

The horseless carriage goes 20 miles an hour on a good, smooth road. A horse can jump ahead for a few seconds, but it will soon get tired. Horseless carriages never get tired. You can ride them all day and all night.

As we ride along, children see the horseless carriage. They run alongside of it. Some try to hang onto the back. The little fellows laugh and shout as we drive on. We stop near the beach. A large crowd gathers quickly. There were many questions. One needs a pile of answer sheets to explain everything to the crowd.

They Laugh For Only A While

Along the beach the horseless carriage gets more attention. The bathers in the water turn and watch us. The horseless carriage is so unusual that most of them laugh at first. Then they calm down and begin to think seriously about it.

All along the way, people run out and look at the horseless carriage. They want one for themselves. The ride is smooth. The carriage is so comfortable and fast. Driving it is so easy. There is almost no danger at all. This carriage has been driven on crowded streets, and it has never been in any accident. An afternoon's ride in a horseless carriage makes a person want to own one.

When we have better roads, we shall see many more horseless carriages in the West. Even horse-owners will start buying them.

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Horses Are Startled" that suggests horseless carriages are better than horses.
- 2 Which question is answered in paragraph 3 of the section "Lots Of Questions?"
 - (A) How is the horseless carriage made?
 - (B) Why are horseless carriages better than horses?
 - (C) How do you operate a horseless carriage?
 - (D) What have people's reactions been to the horseless carriage?

- 3 Read the following sentence from the section "Horses Are Startled."

A large crowd gathers quickly.

Which word could be used to replace "gathers" without changing the meaning of the sentence?

- (A) catches
 - (B) judges
 - (C) tucks
 - (D) grows
- 4 Read this selection from the article.

The horseless carriage easily avoids a crash, though. If needed, the brake could have stopped us.

What does the word "avoids" mean in the selection above?

- (A) breaks
 - (B) dodges
 - (C) rides
 - (D) causes

Answer Key

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Horses Are Startled" that suggests horseless carriages are better than horses.

Paragraph 10:

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- (C) How do you operate a horseless carriage?**
- (D) What have people's reactions been to the horseless carriage?

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